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# Central Idaho Wolf Recovery

## *A Management Report 1990*

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# Central Idaho Wolf Recovery

## *A Management Report 1990*

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Prepared by Jennifer O'Loughlin

A USDA Forest Service Publication sponsored by the
*Central Idaho Wolf Recovery Steering Committee:*

USDA Forest Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Bureau of Land Management

Animal Damage Control

Idaho Department of Fish and Game

To our readers:

The Central Idaho Wolf Recovery Steering Committee was organized in January 1989. It operates as a recommending body for the five agencies participating in wolf recovery in central Idaho. The committee's purpose is to provide focus, direction and leadership toward the recovery of the gray wolf in this area.

The strength of this organization is its interagency composition and its commitment to coordinated wolf management in central Idaho. Each agency contributes expertise essential to success, which will be measured by how well we achieve recovery goals.

This report summarizes the accomplishments and direction provided by the Central Idaho Wolf Recovery Steering Committee in 1989.

Dave Rittersbacher
Steering Committee Chairman

## Charter: Central Idaho Wolf Recovery Steering Committee

Gray wolves in the northern Rockies are listed as an endangered species in Idaho. A recovery plan outlining a strategy to recover the wolf in Idaho was approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in August 1987. The signatory parties below agree to proceed with wolf recovery actions using existing agency authorities. To this end we established in Idaho a Central Idaho Wolf Recovery Steering Committee composed of one Forest Supervisor from the Northern Region, one Forest Supervisor from the Intermountain Region, a representative from the State Office of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, a representative from Animal Damage Control, and a representative from the Bureau of Land Management State Office. This Steering Committee will meet, select officers as needed, and may appoint such subcommittees as necessary to achieve recovery of the gray wolf in central Idaho.

**Mission**: Provide focus, direction and leadership toward the recovery of the gray wolf in central Idaho

JOHN MUMMA, Regional Forester
Region 1 - Forest Service

for STAN TIXIER, Regional Forester
Region 4 - Forest Service

WALLY STEUCKE, Regional Director
Region 1, Idaho Fish and Wildlife Service

JERRY M. CONLEY, Director,
Idaho Department of Fish & Game

DEL VAIL, Director, Bureau of Land Management

MIKE NORTHEN, Director USDA/APHIS
Animal Damage Control

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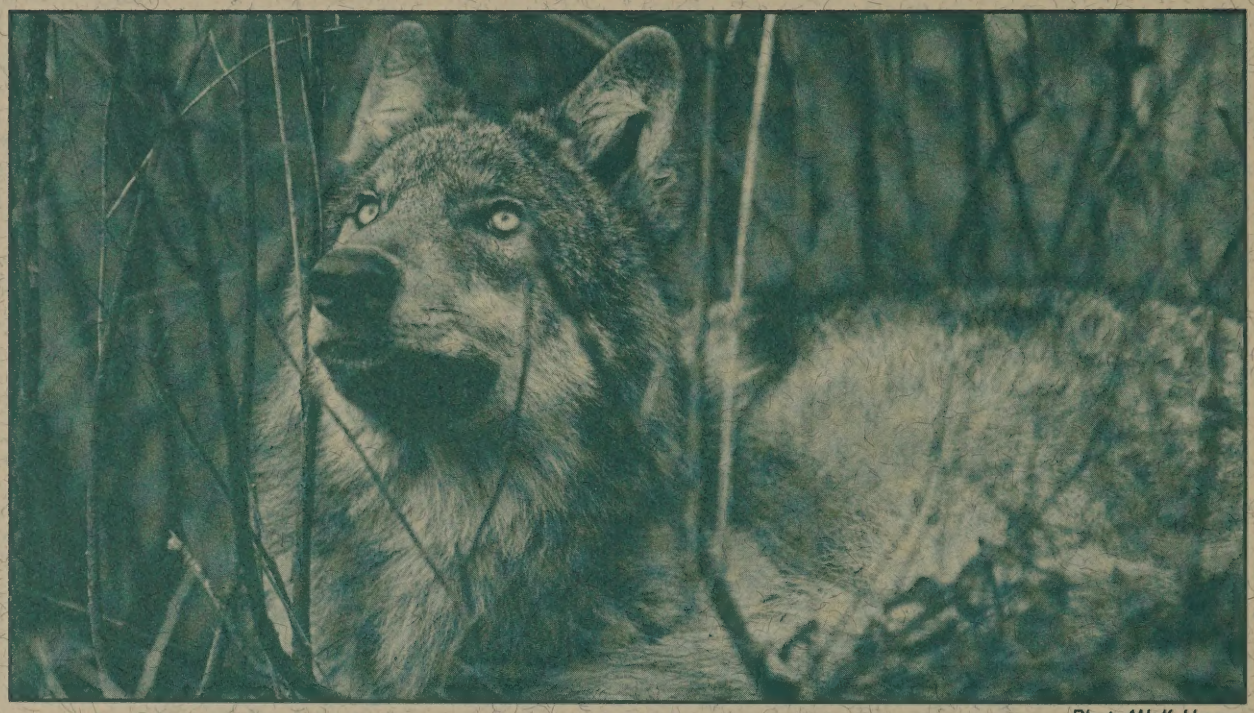


*Photo/Wolf Haven*

# Central Idaho Wolf Recovery Steering Committee

The Central Idaho Wolf Recovery Steering Committee was formed to provide focus, direction and leadership toward the recovery of the gray wolf in central Idaho. It is composed of one forest supervisor from the Forest Service's Northern Region, a forest supervisor from the Intermountain Region, and one representative each from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Fish and Wildlife Service, Animal Damage Control and the Bureau of Land Management.

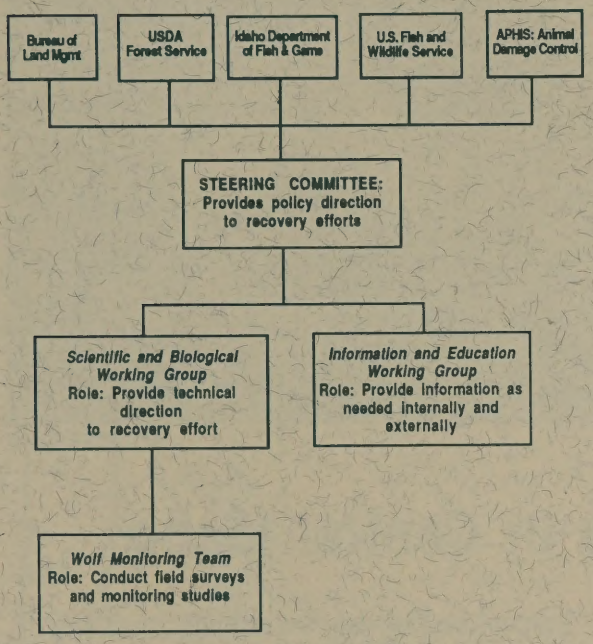
The interagency steering committee appointed and now oversees two working groups: 1) the Scientific and Biological Working Group, which is providing technical advice to those involved in wolf monitoring, and 2) the Information and Education Working Group, which plans to disseminate information about wolves in general, and the central Idaho population in particular, to both agencies and the general public.

The Scientific and Biological Working Group's role is to provide technical direction and advice for the agencies involved in wolf recovery, particularly when their efforts involve: 1) documentation and verification of wolves, 2) surveys of winter range and summer habitat, 3) monitoring, 4) establishment of wolf recovery boundaries and 5) nuisance wolf control.

The Scientific and Biological Working Group divided central Idaho into three data-collection sections -- north (Bitterroot, Clearwater, Lolo, Nez Perce), west (Payette, Boise, Sawtooth) and east (Beaverhead, Challis, Salmon) -- and assigned a wolf verification team to each. Each team is made up of representatives from different agencies in the area; the northern team, for example, consists of one biologist from both the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests, an Animal Damage Control officer and an officer from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. During 1989, team members received training in wolf identification, learning to distinguish, for example, wolf tracks from lion tracks; training also included scat identification and how to make plaster casts of tracks.

Whenever there is a promising report of wolves or wolf sign, the designated section leader of the regional team will contact the other members, after which they will travel to the site of the report and look for physical evidence of wolves.

## Central Idaho Wolf Recovery Organization
### *Participating Agencies*


Bureau of Land Mgmt
USDA Forest Service
Idaho Department of Fish & Game
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
APHIS: Animal Damage Control
STEERING COMMITTEE: Provides policy direction to recovery efforts
Scientific and Biological Working Group
Role: Provide technical direction to recovery effort
Information and Education Working Group
Role: Provide information as needed internally and externally
Wolf Monitoring Team
Role: Conduct field surveys and monitoring studies

Experience in other areas repopulated by wolves has shown that recovery depends on more than careful management. Without public support, wolf recovery will not be possible. The Information and Education Working Group has begun an effort to educate the public on general wolf ecology and provide information about the status of wolves in central Idaho and the management actions that do or could affect wolves in this area. The group recently hired a communications specialist from Boise State University to interview agency officials and representatives of livestock growers, timber and mining interests, conservation groups and other groups interested in or affected by the possibility of wolf recovery in central Idaho. The interviews are designed to obtain a range of opinions about wolves in central Idaho and this information will later be used by the working group to develop public information presentation. The Information and Education Working Group is also developing brochures, legislative briefings, videos, slide shows, public service announcements, displays at county fairs, and feature articles for trade and airline magazines.

## Central Idaho's Managing Agencies

Five agencies are involved in wolf management in Idaho. Each federal agency has a legal mandate to evaluate its management actions to ensure that they are consistent with the 1973 Endangered Species Act, which requires them to "use their authority to further the purposes of the act by carrying out conservation programs for listed species." Several federal agencies and one state agency are now part of the Central Idaho Wolf Recovery Steering Committee, formed to coordinate recovery efforts in central Idaho.

**The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** (Department of Interior) is the lead federal agency in conservation of threatened and endangered species, both plant and animal; it also prepares and approves recovery plans and coordinates recovery actions and progress. Other federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on any action that might adversely affect these species or their habitat. All wolf reports on the forests and other public lands are recorded on standard FWS forms, and the agency thus serves as the initial clearinghouse for this information.

**The USDA Forest Service** (Department of Agriculture) manages the national forest lands in central Idaho. The agency cooperates with federal and state officials to manage threatened and endangered species habitat on national forest lands and to meet recovery objectives.

**The Bureau of Land Management** (Department of Interior) is another agency with lands that may serve as wolf habitat. BLM lands are important to wolf survival because they are generally found at lower elevations, where prey animals such as elk and deer often winter.

**Animal Damage Control** of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (Department of Agriculture) is responsible for predator control on public lands. ADC will work with the interagency wolf teams to help identify the presence of wolves. As experts in predator control, ADC personnel will be responsible for verifying suspected wolf kills. Along with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, ADC will be responsible for control of problem wolves.

**The Idaho Department of Fish and Game** is responsible for fish and wildlife management in the state. Although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for the conservation of wolves and other federally classified threatened and endangered species in Idaho, the Department participates at the level authorized by the Idaho Legislature and the Idaho Fish and Game Commission.

*Photo/Wolf Haven*

# A History of Wolves in Central Idaho

Wolves once roamed through much of Idaho, concentrating in the south and southeast on the prairies and foothills of the Snake River plain. Elk, deer and, to some extent, buffalo, provided their main food source. With the advent of mining in the mid-1800s and livestock grazing in the late 1880s, both wolf populations and their prey base were decimated. By the 1930s, wolves were seldom seen in the northern Rocky Mountain states.

Elk numbers in the state did not begin to recover until the 1920s; recovery was possible largely because of hunting regulations and transplants from herds in Yellowstone National Park. It was shortly after this, in the 1940s, that scattered reports of wolves began in northern Idaho along the Canadian border.

Wolves are tenacious, and their breeding patterns and dispersal activity allow populations to increase quickly, both over time and distance. During a brief hiatus in Canadian control efforts during the 1940s, packs were established over hundreds of square miles from which they had been eradicated. As the wolves extended their Canadian range, several wolf sightings were reported in both the Selkirk Mountains of northern Idaho and the northwest section of Glacier National Park in Montana.

There was apparently little if any wolf activity along the Idaho-British Columbia border through much of the 1950s. There were, however, several wolf reports in central Idaho: Nine sightings were reported on the Boise National Forest between 1941 and 1957, for a total of 15 wolves; of these, four were killed, all from pairs, indicating that there may have been a breeding population in the area at the time. Indeed, some wildlife biologists believe that central Idaho had its own reproducing population of wolves in the 1950s because the Canadian control efforts of the time made it unlikely that dispersers from Alberta or British Columbia packs were traveling into the state.

Reports of wolf occurrence in Idaho increased during the 1960s; in fact, they doubled between 1960 and 1973. This was probably less a matter of more wolves in the area than it was of more humans in the woods. The 1960s and early 1970s were a time of rediscovery of America's wildlands, and people began flocking to the rivers, mountains and valleys of central Idaho to enjoy the area's whitewater, wilderness and wildlife. Some of them reported seeing wolves.

Because there was no systematic evaluation of these reports, it is difficult to assess their validity. There is some indication that some of the observers mistook large coyotes for wolves. Be that as it may, there were 56 wolf occurrence reports in central Idaho between 1960 and 1973, 38 from the portion encompassed by the Challis, Boise and Payette National Forests and 18 from the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests in the north-central portion of the area.

The most significant aspect of these findings was that they primarily involved lone wolves, and there was no evidence during this time that the area was supporting a breeding population. Both Alberta and British Columbia reduced their wolf-control campaign during the 1960s, and there is speculation that the increase in Canadian wolf populations was producing dispersers, which then traveled down through the mountains that separate Idaho and Montana.

## Wolf Occurrence Reports 1974-83

The presence and distribution of wolves from the mid-1970s through the 1980s received considerably more attention than the scattered information from past years. Again, much of this was due to the larger number of people using the backcountry, but the more detailed information also reflected a new interest in wolves. In the early 1980s, the Boise National Forest initiated an effort to track down and evaluate reports of wolf sightings on its lands during the 1970s; this was followed by a similar survey on the Clearwater National Forest. These two forests lie on opposite ends of a 3.6-million-acre wilderness complex, the largest in the contiguous United States, that includes the Frank Church-River of No Return and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness areas. More than 60 percent of the wolf reports through the early '80s were from these two forests.

These reports, and the mandate to protect threatened and endangered species, convinced the agencies responsible for wildlife management in central Idaho to fund an in-depth study of the historical and possible present locations of wolves in central Idaho. In 1983, with funds from the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, researchers from the University of Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit combed state and federal agency records and the scientific literature for historical evidence of wolf distribution and interviewed backcountry residents, hunters, trappers, outfitters, ranchers and agency personnel to compile a list of "probable" and "possible" wolf occurrence reports during the recent past.

The criteria for the "probables" are based on a system that evaluates the observer's distance from the animal reported and his or her ability to recognize characteristics unique to wolves, including color, head and body size, howling and tracks, particularly as compared to coyotes, with which wolves are often confused. Probable reports can also include howling and scats if the observer is experienced enough to distinguish such evidence from that left by other canids. This system is now the standard method used to evaluate wolf reports in the northern Rocky Mountains.

The Wildlife Research Unit study found evidence for 238 probable reports of wolves in central Idaho between 1974 and 1983. Broken down by general region within that area, the reports were as follows:

North (Bitterroot, Clearwater, Nez Perce) -- 142
West (Boise, Payette, Sawtooth) --66
East (Challis, Salmon, Beaverhead) -- 30

It should be emphasized that these reports were made

by a variety of people over a 10-year period and that they indicate the extent rather than the number of wolves. The Wildlife Research Unit study included a two-year effort to gather actual physical evidence of wolves -- scats, kill sites, tracks -- and the researchers found evidence of only one to four wolves. The study estimated that the wolf population in the entire central Idaho area did not exceed about 15 wolves during the decade studied and that these were mostly lone wolves.

## Wolf Occurrence Reports 1984-86

The 1984 Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit report marked the beginning of a more organized and intensive agency effort to track central Idaho's elusive wolves. The Fish and Wildlife Service produced a wolf recovery plan for the northern Rockies, and other agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management and Animal Damage Control of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service began getting involved as agency personnel contemplated the management and control issues that would surface with a recovering wolf population.

The move toward more formal organization and management continued with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game's decision to enter a cooperative agreement with The Nature Conservancy to establish the Idaho Natural Heritage Program in 1984. Now a part of the Fish and Game Department, the Heritage Program developed a central data management system for information on the status and distribution of rare animals and plants throughout the state; it thus became a clearinghouse for the wolf occurrence reports scattered through the files of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service and other agencies.

In addition to pulling together older information and processing new occurrence reports from both state and federal agencies, the Boise National Forest contracted with The Nature Conservancy to survey Idaho elk hunters about any wolf sign they may have seen during the hunting season. Conducted from August 1988 through March 1989, the survey contacted 2,500 elk hunters and 110 outfitters through letters; 25 percent of the elk permit holders who had indicated that they were going to hunt in the central Idaho area were later interviewed by phone.

The survey recorded 248 accounts of wolf sightings, howling or tracks; 137 of these were given a probable rating. The occurrence patterns showed considerable consistency with those of the past decade -- that is, a loose clustering in the Boise and Clearwater National Forests on the south and north ends of Idaho's vast wilderness areas and more scattered reports from the intervening and adjacent forests. The probable reports from 1984 through the early months of 1989 were as follows by general region:

North (Clearwater, Nez Perce) -- 82
West (Boise, Payette, Sawtooth) -- 59
East (Challis, Salmon, Beaverhead) -- 27

Seventy-eight percent of the probable reports from the Heritage Program data base were of lone animals, a proportion similar to that found in the Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit study and other surveys.

*Photo/Wolf Haven*

# Recovery

Almost half a century after the last wolf packs were seen in the northern Rocky Mountains, Congress passed the 1973 Endangered Species Act. Wolf recovery programs, which have the ultimate goal of a stable breeding population, are now underway in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, the Southwest, the Southeast and the northern Rocky Mountains.

The northern Rocky Mountain recovery effort centers on three recovery areas: Yellowstone National Park, northwest Montana and central Idaho. Wolves returned on their own to northwest Montana during the past decade, and there are now three packs, representing 20 to 25 wolves, with territories extending into Canada. These animals were the first wolves known to den in the northern Rocky Mountain area for 50 years.

In areas like northwest Montana where wolf packs have returned after years of absence, population recovery was preceded by many years of persistent but often unsubstantiated sightings. Reports of wolves in central Idaho during the past 15 years have been consistent but scattered, indicating that the population has been composed primarily of individual animals, whose presence does not necessarily indicate a breeding population.

This does not mean that there are no wolves in the area. In Alaska's Kenai Peninsula, after undocumented sightings of wolves persisted through the 1960s, researchers finally documented the presence of a pair in the latter part of the decade; within two years, a pack had formed, and the Kenai wolf population reached 180 by 1975.

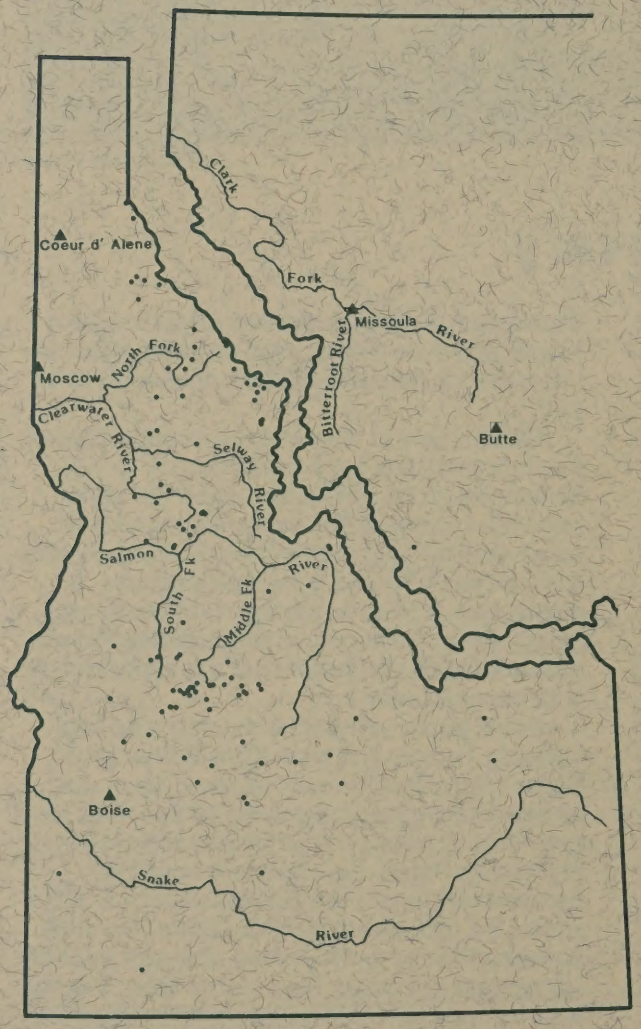
Recovery plans for threatened and endangered animal species generally take one of two approaches: 1) reintroduction of the species into appropriate habitat from which it was eliminated, and 2) encouragement of natural recovery. One example of the first approach, which is the less frequently used, is the highly successful reintroduction of peregrine falcons in both Western and Eastern states. The recovery of bald eagle populations in much of the nation after the ban on DDT is a good example of the second approach.

Natural recovery of wolves is occurring in the area drained by the North Fork of the Flathead River along Glacier National Park's western boundary. Here, after persistent rumors of sightings during the late 1970s and early 1980s, 90 percent of which involved single wolves, Wolf Ecology Project researchers discovered that dispersers from Canada had established a pack in 1982; it was the first pack seen in the United States west of the Mississippi River for almost 50 years. This pack eventually split into three new packs. There are now about 25 wolves in the northwest Montana/southeast British Columbia area.

Like the northwest Montana population, the central

Idaho wolf population will depend initially on dispersers from Canadian packs. Wolves have proved themselves determined travelers, particularly loners searching for a mate and/or territory, and will often reestablish themselves hundred of miles from their home pack. The Wolf Ecology Project has documented five dispersers from the northwest Montana packs, one of which traveled 550 miles to the north. If that animal had chosen to travel the same distance south or southwest, she would have reached Yellowstone Park or central Idaho.

## Wolf Occurrence Reports 1987-89




In less than five years, the northwest Montana wolves more than doubled their numbers (although some of these may have been immigrants from Canada). Hypothetically, at least, a central Idaho population could do the same once breeding pairs were established.

The human role in this natural recovery is spelled out in the Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan, prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a set of guidelines for those agencies who manage the lands where wolf recovery is planned. Within these general guidelines, the strategy to promote wolf recovery varies in different areas. In central Idaho, with its natural and very slow wolf recovery, the emphasis is on encouraging cooperation among the affected agencies to monitor the existing wolf population and determine whether recovery is taking place. Recovery in central Idaho is defined as 10 breeding pairs. Once this goal is reached and maintained for at least three years, wolves will be reclassified from endangered to threatened, which would provide more flexibility for control; if the population increases well beyond the recovery goal, the wolf may be "delisted," and management of the animal would be turned over to the state.

As defined by the Northern Rockies Recovery Plan, natural reestablishment of wolves depends on 1) large blocks of land with a low density of people, 2) suitable and somewhat secluded denning and rendezvous sites, 3) ample year-round prey 4) legal protection and 5) public support. The extensive wilderness and adjacent lands of central Idaho obviously meet the first two criteria. The third criterion was addressed by the Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit work of the early 1980s, which included a survey of elk summer and winter ranges; researchers found a prey base that could support more than twice the number of wolves envisioned for recovery.

Legal protection can take several forms, ranging from management tactics for other species that enhance or protect wolf habitat to specific law enforcement activities. An example is the use of existing seasonal road closures and elk hunting restrictions on several central Idaho forests, which also protect potential wolf habitat. The forests regularly close roads with berms or gates as part of elk management during hunting and calving seasons; because wolf habitat overlaps prey habitat, these closures would also protect wolves from contact with poachers and other human intrusion.

In another example of management tactics, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management include a biological evaluation of impacts on endangered species in their plans for timber sales and other activities, just as they evaluate the effects of such actions on other resources such as water quality, recreational use, etc. The biological evaluation, which includes formal or informal

consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, ensures that the action will not harm endangered populations in the affected area.

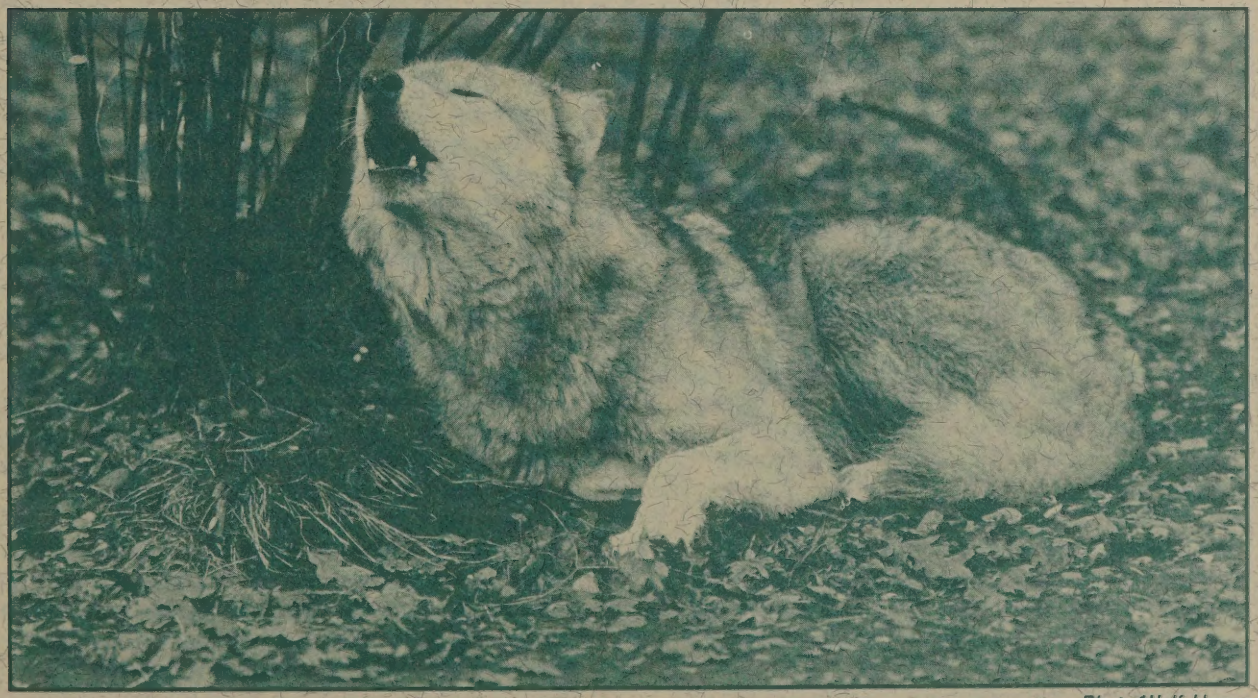
Protection of wolf populations occasionally requires removal of individual wolves, either through relocation or elimination. Although the wolf is considered an endangered species in the northern Rockies, court decisions have ruled that the Endangered Species Act allows control actions when such actions would enhance the population's ability to survive and/or propagate. The reasoning here is that depredating wolves are a potential threat to the wolf population as a whole because they could spark human retaliation, legal or illegal. The Fish and Wildlife Service has a draft wolf control plan that would allow for removal of wolves that attack livestock.

Control actions must follow specific guidelines designed to make sure that only depredating wolves are targeted. Basically, control is an interagency effort involving the Fish and Wildlife Service, Animal Damage Control, the land management agency (Forest Service or BLM) and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. The authorized control officers from one or more of these agencies must respond to a depredation report within 48 hours after it is made.

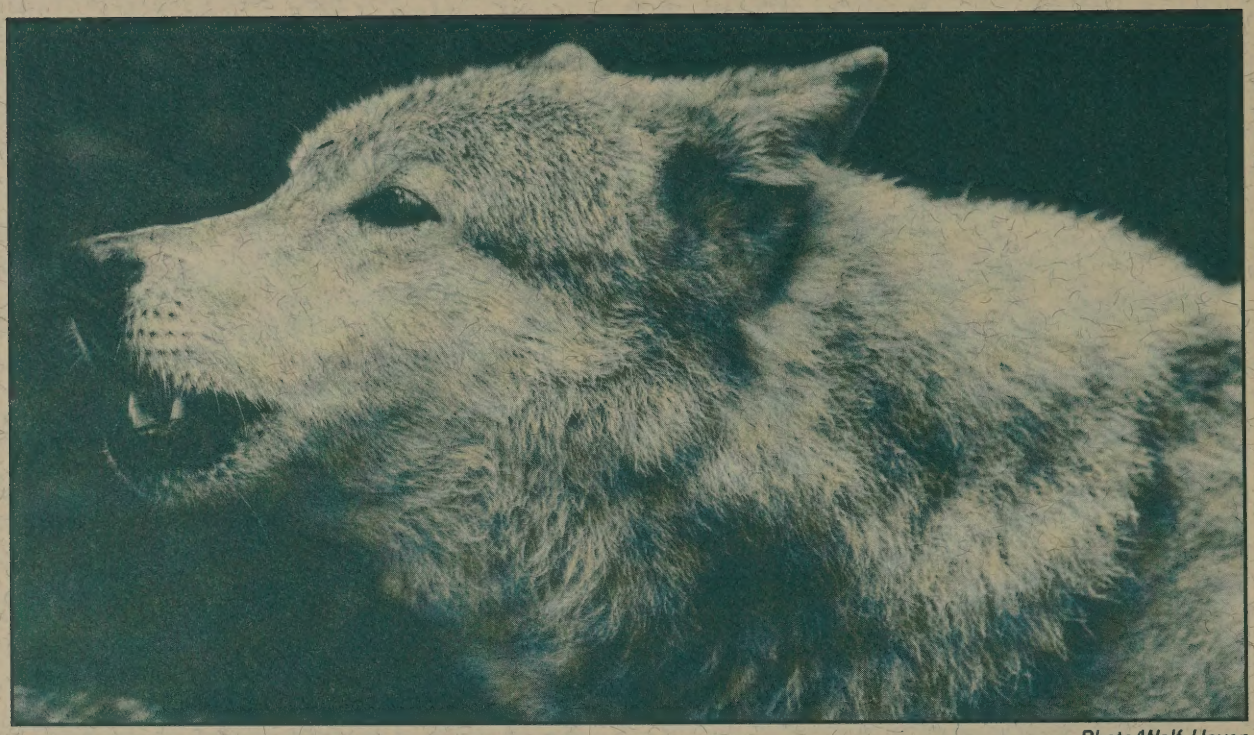
In the early stages of population recovery, depredating wolves may be radio-collared and relocated rather than killed; if the offending animal is caught a second time, it will be eliminated. As recovery progresses, problem wolves may be killed after their first depredation.

Wolves reproduce quickly, so the loss of an individual does not usually represent a threat to the population as a whole, as it might in a grizzly bear population. Also unlike grizzlies, wolves are not primarily carrion eaters, although they may be attracted to a carcass during lean times. Studies in both Canada and Minnesota indicate that they prefer natural (as opposed to domesticated) prey and that they will leave livestock alone if their natural food source is sufficient.

This does not mean that wolves never cause problems for livestock owners. In Minnesota, where about 1,200 wolves live in the northeastern part of the state, Animal Damage Control officer, removed 85 problem wolves between October 1988 and August 1989 because of depredation problems. In 1985, on the other hand, control officers verified 35 livestock deaths due to wolves; this is an area with about 250,000 cattle and 90,000 sheep. On the other hand, in Alberta, which has a substantial wolf population, the provincial agricultural agency considers bears much more of a problem than wolves; in 1988, the agency verified 48 wolf depredations in the province's southern half.



*Photo/Wolf Haven*



*Photo/Wolf Haven*

# Monitoring

Because of the considerable interest in, and speculation about, the presence of wolves in central Idaho, it's easy to forget that there is very little information about their actual extent or numbers. Despite literally hundreds of reports of howling, kill sites, scat and actual wolves, the only hard evidence so far to prove that there are wolves in central Idaho are three or four photographs taken on the Clearwater National Forest and the carcass of a wolf killed on the Boise National Forest in 1978.

The Central Idaho Wolf Steering Committee has thus decided that its first task is to concentrate on verifying future sightings and providing some hard evidence of wolves-- in the form of photographs, scat and plaster casts of tracks.

This effort is basically taking three routes: 1) completion of the survey canvassing elk hunters about possible wolf sightings, 2) interagency wolf verification teams to evaluate probable reports, and 3) field surveys.

The Boise National Forest is completing the survey it initiated in 1988. This year's survey will concentrate on phone interviews with elk and bear hunters, outfitters and trappers and will be completed by March 1990. Sighting reports will be used to identify sighting "clusters," thus giving all of the agencies some idea of where to concentrate their monitoring efforts.

Not every wolf sighting will merit investigation; indeed, the Scientific and Biological Working Group envisions only two or three trips a year by each team. The first criteria for investigation is timeliness. A team will not go out, for example, to investigate a hunter's report that he or she saw a wolf two weeks earlier. The general rule is that a team will try to respond to a report within 48 hours after the sighting. Perhaps the most important aspect of the team approach is that it emphasizes the need to share both information and resources in the wolf monitoring.

The national forests in central Idaho and western Montana are now stepping up their individual monitoring efforts to detect wolves within their boundaries. Although actual tactics vary, each area is using both past sighting patterns and new probable reports to decide where to concentrate monitoring efforts. Each area has different

topographical characteristics and different monitoring approaches, so a brief description of each is in order. The probable wolf sighting numbers given for 1987-89 include only the first half of 1989; reports from that year's hunting season may add considerably to the final numbers.

## North Section

The ***Bitterroot National Forest*** has had only two probable wolf sightings, both in the early 1980s in the Idaho portion of the forest, although its lands lie adjacent to the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests, both of which have had consistent sightings over the past 15 years.

Monitoring on the forest has focused on distribution of wolf identification posters and standard Fish and Wildlife Service report forms to hunters in the Idaho portion of the forest. As yet, no one has seen any wolf sign. Future monitoring will continue this practice. A forest biologist also inspected 38 miles of wet trails and 51 miles of dry trails in the forest's Idaho lands without detecting evidence of wolves.

There were 14 wolf sightings on the ***Clearwater National Forest*** between 1987 and the summer of 1989. The Clearwater is taking a proactive approach to wolf monitoring. Biologists placed bait stations and remote-sensing cameras during the winter of 1988-89 and conducted surveys for wolf sign in all of the major big game winter ranges. Forest personnel have conducted some wolf field surveys in conjunction with Idaho Fish and Game personnel while surveying elk; this team approach allowed Clearwater biologists to participate in 120 hours of aerial surveys over a three-week period.

One unique approach being taken by the forest involves use of Landsat satellite data to identify wolf and grizzly bear habitat. Originally designed to identify grizzly habitat such as meadows and avalanche chutes, this data may also yield some valuable information about possible wolf denning and rendezvous sites. In addition to wolf sightings, the Clearwater has had several reports of grizzly sightings over the past few years so is now involved in monitoring the possible presence of both species.

There were 27 probable sightings on the ***Nez Perce National Forest*** between 1987 and 1989. Monitoring efforts in 1989 included location of two remote-sensing cameras with bait stations in the Salmon River breaks and snowmobile surveys for scat, tracks and kill sites. These efforts will be continued during 1990 in areas that have historically produced a pattern of wolf sightings; biologists may also try some howling surveys in these areas.

## West Section

The ***Boise National Forest*** has had a consistently large number of probable sightings -- 30 in 1987-89. Its monitoring program includes surveys of elk winter ranges along the South and Middle Fork of the Payette River for wolf sign and placement of scent stations and remote-sensing cameras in the Landmark and Deadwood Reservoir areas.

***National Forests - Central Idaho and Montana***

The Boise National Forest is well into its second and final year of a survey of elk hunters in all of the central Idaho forests; each of these forests is also sending in any unsolicited reports about wolves.

Three wolf sightings were reported on the ***Payette National Forest*** from 1987 through early 1989. In the spring of 1989, the forest used both aerial and ground surveys to search for wolves in several key big game winter ranges, Idaho Department of Fish and Game winter feeding sites and general areas of big game concentrations on both the Payette and Boise National Forests. Ground surveys included ridge tops, creek bottoms, benches, game trails, hiking trails, logging roads and migration routes. Tracks at least three inches wide and four inches long were photographed, and large scat were collected for analysis.

In all, two sets of tracks were found on the Payette, both in the drainage defined by the South Fork of the Salmon River; four samples of scat were collected. Two tracks were found on the Boise National Forest along the South Fork of the Payette River; no scat was observed. A similar survey is planned for 1990.

There were five probable wolf sightings on the ***Sawtooth National Forest*** from 1987-89. To encourage people to report any wolf sightings within its boundaries, the forest has distributed posters comparing the physical characteristics of wolves and coyotes to all of its offices and some local stores and lodges; its visitor center near Ketchum has a full mount of a wolf on display. Seasonal employees have been given instructions in wolf identification and a coyote/wolf comparison chart. The Sawtooth has also purchased a remote-sensing camera for use in future monitoring efforts.

## *Monitoring Techniques*

Monitoring of reported wolf activity in central Idaho involves verifying wolf occurrence, following population trends and, potentially, radio-collaring individual wolves to determine pack activity or disperser movement. At present, central Idaho monitoring efforts are designed to try determine whether the area has wolves.

The central Idaho forests' annual survey of outfitters, guides and hunters throughout the area is being used to help estimate the pattern of wolf distribution in the area. Agencies will then use this information to identify areas where more intensive field surveys and other techniques might be appropriate.

Each forest and/or agency is using its own particular combination of techniques. All will respond to particularly promising wolf sightings by activating the interagency wolf monitoring teams, which will try to reach the site within 48 hours of the report and search for evidence of wolves. Both ground and aerial surveys in big game ranges or areas with a history of sightings are being tried.

When tracks are found, biologists will photograph them and, if possible, make casts for future review by experts; this will help distinguish the tracks from those of other predators such as mountain lions. Scats will be analyzed to determine the presence of hair; wolves often groom themselves, so scats may contain considerable amounts of wolf hair, which can be analyzed to determine species. Much of this survey work will be done in the winter because it is easier to find tracks and kill sites during that season.

Many forests have purchased remote-sensing cameras, which they combine with bait or scent stations in areas with recent sightings. The cameras are battery-powered, 35-millimeter units; they have an infrared sensor activated by an abrupt change in infrared heat -- that is, by a warm-blooded animal in motion. The cameras are situated near an area either baited with an ungulate carcass or scented with wolf urine. The cameras can be left for up to two weeks, and they provide an inexpensive documentation technique.

Scent or bait stations are also used to try to obtain wolf tracks. The bait or scent is located in an area with fine soil or sand, which biologists check on occasion for tracks.

In areas where two or more wolves have been reported, biologists may use howling to get animals to respond. Although adult and single wolves rarely respond to human howling, pups often will, thus providing evidence of a breeding pair. Summer is the best time for this monitoring technique.

If and when it becomes evident that central Idaho has a recovering wolf population, with breeding pairs and pack activity, agency biologists may trap animals and fit them with radio collars to monitor wolf movement.

## East Section

There have been several wolf sightings on the ***Beaverhead National Forest***, two on the Lemhi Pass area of the Montana-Idaho border. Current monitoring on the Beaverhead is concentrating on the Continental Divide along the forest's border with the Salmon National Forest. One person has been trained to deploy and monitor several recently purchased remote-sensing cameras in the area and will also conduct ground surveys for tracks and other wolf sign.

Most of the wolf sightings in the ***Challis National Forest***, which had 12 reports in 1987-89, were made in or near its wilderness areas. Forest biologists plan to continue monitoring all wolf reports, but there is no plan to locate cameras in past sighting areas or conduct surveys on big game winter range until there is more evidence that a wolf pack is living on or near the forest.

Challis National Forest biologists do plan to participate in some interagency studies that might yield information on wolves. For example, the forest helped coordinate a recent Idaho Department of Fish and Game survey of elk on the Middle Fork of the Salmon. Information from this study might prove useful for identifying potential wolf habitat.

There have been a number of wolf sightings on the ***Lolo National Forest***, although none has been rated as probable. However, the Lolo's borders with the Clearwater National Forest to the west and the Bitterroot National Forest to the south make it an essential part of the wolf travel corridor leading from Canada and northwest Montana down into central Idaho.

The Lolo does not have a formal wolf monitoring program, but forest biologists have been incorporating an informal search for wolf information in some of their other activities. For example, they have asked Forest Service permittees -- individuals with permits to use Forest Service lands for specific activities such as grazing, logging and outfitting -- to watch for wolf sign in the areas they are using.

Five probable wolf sightings were reported on the ***Salmon National Forest*** in 1987-89. The forest does not have a formal plan to monitor wolves, although forest biologists do intend to investigate any probable sightings. They may conduct some howling surveys in 1990, particularly on the Leadore Ranger District on the Montana-Idaho border, which has had persistent reports of wolves along the Continental Divide.

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